5) The tying of the cotton string.

854 When the child "tiyelanyana" viz. "becomes a little firm,"
857 the mother, having to plough her fields and to cook the food, begins to seat him on the sandy soil, after having made a kind of hole of about five inches in depth. We have seen Thonga babies already sitting at the age of two months. But this "dumping" hardly meets all the requirements, and the mother looks for a girl to help her to take care of the baby (wa ku tlanga na ye, to play with him). She puts the child in the charge of an elder sister or a cousin ; a girl of five to ten is quite strong enough for the purpose. I have often admired the patience of these miniature nurses, sometimes not very much bigger than the child they carry, with their very troublesome babies.

852 But very soon the child begins to crawl (kasa) and this is the
115 time when a very striking rite is performed. This rite seems to be practised all over the tribe, but it has more importance in the Northern clans than amongst the Ba-Ronga. I shall here give the description of Viguet, who belonged to the Tsungu clan and had emigrated to the Spelonken. My readers must forgive me if I cannot tell the story with all its details and if I am obliged to write some of them in Latin (1).

851 These are the ipsissima verba of my informant : "This is a
833 great law amongst the Thongas. When a child begins to crawl,
766 even before, the *puri* is tied round his waist. The *puri* is a
842 cotton (2) string. Father and mother fix the day ; if they forget to do so, their parents, (the grandparents) will remind them of the law. They must have sexual intercourse, but in such a way that the mother will not become pregnant, s. n. i. (Annotatio 2)[1]. The mother will have to take in her hands "their filth" (thyaka ra bona) smear the string with it and tie it round the child. It will

(1) A more complete description of this rite and of some others related to the taboos of the Thongas will be found in the Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie, Oct. 1910, Paris.

(2) There are plants of cotton probably subspontaneous in the Low Country of the Transvaal of Delagoa Bay.

1 [See p. 676 in these categories or in 116--Analyst]

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862 842 see that conception has taken place before the child is weaned, they will hasten the ceremony. But they will be severely judged by the old people. Should the little one be sick, the husband will be scolded by the parents of the mother. They will say: "A djambeli ñwana," he has caused damage to the child! If a man forces his wife to transgress the law, she will run during the night to the hut of her husband's father to tell him. Actually this is a very rare occurrence. Children follow each other regularly at an interval of two and a half or three years, and seldom is the law transgressed which says: A mother must nurse her child during three "hoes," viz. three ploughing seasons.

B. CHILDHOOD

591 861 857 The infant, shiputja (Ro.) shihlangi (Dj.) is on the way to become a boy, mufana. During the first years of this period, which extends from the third to the fourteenth year, he stays with his grandparents. They do not give him much "education." He grows at Mother Nature's good pleasure. And as Nature is not always synonymous with morality, he sometimes commits bad actions. Sometimes also, fearing chastisement for a particularly wicked deed, he flees from the kraal of the grandparents and goes home, where the paternal hand will hold him a little more firmly. But the father does not bother much with these little boys and they enjoy an immense amount of liberty. These years are perhaps the happiest of their whole life. They spend their time in the following occupations: herding the goats, stealing, catching game, learning the science of the velt, playing.

1) Herding the goats.

231 Just as the Kaffir corn is the old Thonga cereal which is used alone in the rites, so the goat is the domestic animal par excellence, no doubt the first which the tribe knew and that which is always employed in the sacrifices. Goats are very common; everybody

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possesses one or two. They are kept together in one of the villages and the sons of the master of the village or of the other proprietors must tend them. They "stay with the goats" (tjhana timbutin) till their tenth or eleventh year and afterwards they are promoted to the care of the ozen, supposing there are ozen in the village.

The young goatherds, with hardly anything on—a meagre

Phot. H.-A. Junod.

Boys herding goats on the Shilouane plain
(In the background, the Mananwiri mountain).

belt of tails or bits of skin hanging from their loins, sometimes only in front, nothing behind,—go to the velt playing on their little trumpets, made of a bone or a reed. They pass by the gardens, and the goats look with one eye at the green mealies, the fresh leaves of the sweet potatoes which are not protected by stone walls, (there is hardly a stone all over the Thonga country) nor by barbed wire fences. But the boys are on the watch and

231 857 867 "cut the road" from the goats (tjemetela) to keep them away from the gardens. They safely reach the little plain where nothing but hard Gramineae grow. There the boys begin to play, having handed over the charge of the goats to the youngest of the party. The little chap gets tired of watching; little by little the whole herd goes back to the forbidden garden and eats greedily of the savoury stems of the mealies! After a while, the boys discover that the goats are gone. They run after them, and bring them back. But the mistress of the garden passes near by, coming back from the well with her pitcher on her head. She sees the harm done, inspects the traces of the goats, knows by them which herd has plundered her field, uproots some of the spoiled stems and with great clamour goes to the village of the guilty boys and throws down the mealies right before the hut of the father. No compensation is claimed in such a case, generally, but the father will thrash the boys when they come back; or should there be a recurrence of the offence, the husband of the owner of the garden will himself administer a correction to the careless goatherds.

827 857 Boys herding the goats have certain customs. When one of them emits a certain unseemly sound from the rectum, the others say to him: "Fakisa!" He must answer: "Cita munyakanya goben." (I have let out my wind by the rectum). This formula, which is Zulu, is secret. If he does not know it, they beat him and make him look after the goats till the end of the day. Should another boy reveal the answer to the uninitiated, they will punish him in the same way.

2) Stealing.

685 857 What were they doing when the goats escaped? They had probably themselves succeeded in stealing some sweet potatoes and were roasting them on a little fire, well hidden in the velt. Or they had discovered in the bush a broken pot, an old disused and perforated mortar, which some one had placed there to attract bees. And indeed there was honey inside. They had stolen it... Goatherds are regular thieves and known as such.

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685 857 Generally speaking the elder boys send the younger to commit these thefts, and the plunder is enjoyed by the whole company. They threaten to beat them if they return empty-handed. A sad fate for the youngsters—blows on all sides ; blows from the owners of the fields if they are caught, blows from their comrades if they bring nothing back with them!

Here are one or two tricks employed by the little thieves. In order to take a water-melon (khalabatla) out of a field without being noticed by the women who are busy pulling up their ground nuts, they cut the stalk and fasten it to a piece of string. The other end of this is attached to the leg of the thief, who moves away slowly, drawing the water-melon after him. When he is out of reach of the women, he hastily puts it under his arm and makes off at top speed.

To catch a hen without its making a sound, they dig a little hole behind the huts of the village, and put a few grains of maize in it. The fowl puts its head into the hole to eat the grains, and immediately the little rascal who was watching from behind a bush, rushes out, seizes it by the neck and carries it off before it can utter a single cry!

672 685 The penalty when a boy is caught is a good whipping without a fine. "Psa batjongwana ! It is an action of little boys !" These minor thefts are not considered serious.

3) Catching game.

262 223 857 Hunger is the constant companion of these boys, who do not get enough to eat at home. It is true they ate to their heart's content (shura) yesterday evening, but this morning they had only a very scanty breakfast (fihluta). They try to satisfy their never satisfied appetite by catching game : not big game of course, as they have no real weapons, but birds, field-mice, eggs in the nests (the less fresh they are, the better, because there is more meat inside!) etc. To get birds they throw their sticks at them, and are very clever at killing a partridge as it rises heavily from the grass ; or they make traps with a flexible stick to which they tie a string with a bait. They bend the stick, set the trap by means

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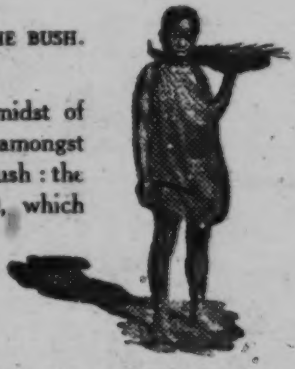
of a little bit of wood, and when the bird puts its beak into the bait, it is caught round the neck by the string. On the borders of the lake of Rikatla, boys used to catch even big birds with these traps. They set many kinds of snares. One is a cage made of sticks of palm marrows which shuts automatically when a bird enters and eats the grain by which it has been attracted. They sometimes build two walls of sticks planted in the soil and converging to the same point, where they reach a little door provided with the trap. Hares are sometimes caught in this way. They follow the wall, and when they go through the door, they tread on a hurdle which is connected with a bent rod : the rod springs back and the hare is caught.

4) Learning the science of the bush.



Phot. G. Liengme.
A Thonga boy.

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This life in the velt, always in the midst of Nature, develops the power of observation amongst the boys. They know everything in the bush : the big Psyche caterpillar (Eumeta cervina), which hangs from the nembe-nembe shrub, (Cassia petersiana) like a little bundle of sticks, and which they call *mahambanindlwane*, " the one who walks with his house ;" the big Carabid beetle which appears with the first rain, the Anthia alveolata, marked with large hollows on the elytra and which is therefore named " the son of the smallpox ." Indeed I found in Rikatla a boy who knew that a certain white cocoon found on the branches of the nkanye tree (Sclerocarya caffra) gives birth to the splendid green Queen Moth (Argema Mimosae).

[262]

Having collected beetles and butterflies extensively for years, I have had an opportunity of recognizing the power of observation of these boys, who were my best hunters! Of course they particularly appreciate things edible... especially the *shitambela*, a big Bupresta beetle which they roast and suck.

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857 Learning, as they do, the native names of all these creatures and their habits, they certainly acquire a great amount of knowledge during these years.

5) Playing.

857 533 Sometimes the weather is bad ; it rains or it is dreadfully hot. Then the goatherd suffers, and his elder brother comfortably sitting in the hut trills this song :

Far away, there where he is, he weeps, the little boy.
The keeper of the goats and of the calves !

But the bad days are rare and the boys play more than they cry!

524 The *games* of the Thongas are very numerous and are played either during the day or in the evening, especially when the moon shines. I shall here only consider the boys' games, and speak of the girls' later on.

Ngulube yi da mimphobo. (The pig eats mealie cobs). One child plays the part of the pig ; crawling along, covered with a mortar and a piece of cloth, he goes from one hut to another followed by a troup of his friends, who clap their hands and sing the foregoing words. People give food to the pig. It is received by its friends. When they have visited all the yards, they assemble on the central place of the village and eat the food together. Sometimes the pig suddenly turns round and attacks his followers, who flee in terror.

The game of *nsema.* This is a disk of woven grass made by boys. They pick up sides. The nsema is set rolling by one side and the opponents must run towards it and pierce it with their sticks before it falls to the ground. It is not allowable to touch it when it has fallen (yi holile). This game goes on till the disk is quite spoilt (yi bolile). Then the two sides rush upon each other and exchange a sound cudgelling, after which they all go and bathe in the nearest pool without any ill-feeling.

There is another game played with this disk, the game of the *ndlopfa-ndlopfana* (that is to say " the little elephant "). A boy

In their country there
524 are big nasty yellow-brown hornets (a kind of Belonogaster)
136 which build more or less circular nests, sometimes attaining to the size of a man's head. On a certain day the boys decide to make war on these enemies. They make shields with the leaves of the *nala* palm tree which they plait together.

524 They cut down branches, which they wave to protect themselves, and one of them goes and strikes a heavy blow on the wasps' nest! The irritated insects rush out on their assailants and sting them. The boys try to kill the wasps with their sticks or to crush them when they light on them. Sometimes, overcome by the pain, they run away; sometimes, resisting to the last, they kill and exterminate their winged enemies.

Besides this there are also *big battles between the shepherds* of the different flocks. The shepherds amuse themselves by taking one another's cattle. Those who are the strongest bring the stolen herd triumphantly back to the neighbourhood of their village, but they would never let it enter the kraal. The vanquished call to their help their elder brothers, who come to recover their property and, if they can, give the thieves a sound thrashing!

578 Insults and fights are frequent between the clans. The boys
262 of Mpfumu call out to those of Matjolo: " Forest gadders! Eaters
291 of snails and boas, of lizards and tortoises " (all of which are questionable food!) (In Ronga: Balala! Badi ba tihumba ni tinhlaru ni makhwahle ni tinfutchu). Those of Matjolo answer them: " Crowd of women that you are, clad in cotton material! " (Babasati! Matchimbamphela!), in reference to the fact that the inhabitants of Mpfumu, living near the town, some time ago replaced the belt of skins worn by the savages by a piece of cotton tied to the waist and hanging down to the knee (ladula).

855 The custom of frightening children with imaginary beasts is
857 wide spread amongst the Thongas. The bogey man is called
538 *Shingomu-Ngomu* or else *Shikunkununu*, and by this very expressive
861 word they designate a huge and mighty being who walks, swaying his big body from right to left, with a sound like *ngomu-ngomu*. The ogre is *Shitukulumukumba*, a word coming originally from the Zulus, which corresponds to the Ronga *Ñwambilutimhokoxa*, that is to say: " the one who has scales on the heart. " He eats

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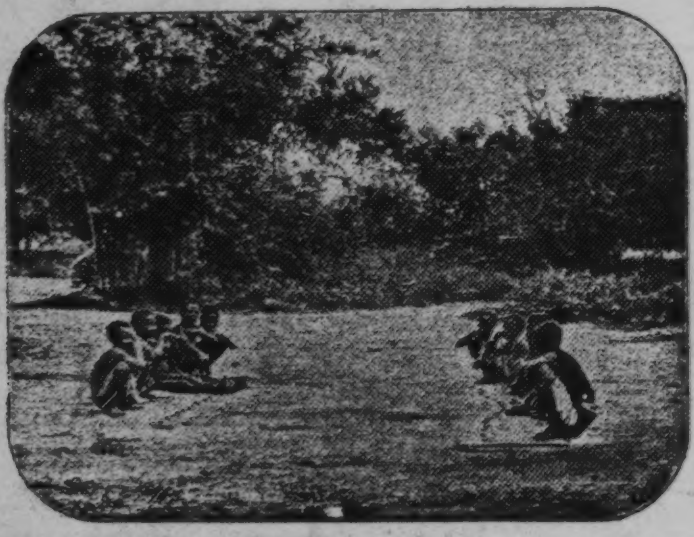
855 human beings. These imaginary creatures play a large part in
538 the native tales, especially the one who " has scales on the heart. "
He feeds on vermin, lice and big white beetle larvae, which are his
almonds (1).

855 When a child cries and cannot be comforted, someone goes and
hides behind the hut and slaps his neck saying: "U-u-u," while

[524]



Boys trying to play Billiards
at Mapedje's, near Antioka Station.

those remaining with the lamenting little one say to him: " Be
quiet, listen! Shikunkununu is coming! "

857 There are also the *timbelembele*, a kind of terrible wasp which
only exists in the imagination of children. When a boy does
not dare to follow his companions up a tree which they have
climbed, they shout to him: " Make haste! Here are the timbele-
mbele coming to bite you! " And he is so frightened that he at
once finds strength to climb.

(1) We shall given complete ogre tale in Part V.

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534 Thonga boys are so fond of games that they even try to imitate
177 those of the Europeans. In the accompanying illustration, they are seen sitting in two rows throwing some projectiles along the ground. I wondered what game this was, and was informed that these boys, having seen Portuguese officials playing billiards at the camp, had attempted to do the same, and this was the result!

C. THE AGE OF PUBERTY

I. *Circumcision rites.*

1) Spread and origin of circumcision amongst the Thongas.

857 As he grows up, the Thonga boy leaves the flock of goats and is entrusted with the care of the big cattle, oxen and cows,
881 when his father owns any. He becomes very proud, and tyran-
882 nises over his younger brothers; he calls himself their "hosi,"
866 their chief, and sends them to work for him; in Maputju, big boys went so far as to scorn water brought from the pool by women, and only to use water specially fetched by small boys. If they grow so important in their own eyes, the reason is that special rites are performed on them during this period, rites which are calculated to give them great self-confidence. Amongst these rites, some have a direct relation with the sexual life and some represent only the entrance upon manhood. Let us begin with a study of circumcision, then we will take the other puberty rites and the habit of *gangisa*.

881 In a great many Bantu tribes, the age of puberty is marked
304 by ceremonies of initiation, often accompanied by circumcision. There is little doubt that circumcision was practised throughout the Thonga tribes in former times. It is still current with those Thongas who emigrated into the Transvaal, and this is not a custom borrowed from the Pedi clans, which have all preserved circumcision. Though the Thongas often receive initiation in Pedi schools, in the Spelonken, they possess their own schools

(See page 48.) After her birth she is carried in the skin of a gazelle (mhunti) which her mother ties round her neck and loins. When that skin has become too small, they get one of an antelope (mhala). She begins to walk ; when her mother sends her on an errand she is able to do it. She also begins to talk, and to know her father and mother. Then, when she has grown, they prepare for her a small pot of pounded and cooked mealies so that she may eat of it. After three years she is weaned and goes to stay for a time with her grandmother. After that she returns home.

"When she has learnt to walk, she is very fond of playing with the shells of the sala. She cooks in them. Then, when she has done with them, she takes small pots and cooks little dinners. She also gets a small calabash, she goes to the lake to draw water and, on coming back, she gives it to her father so that he may wash his face. Here she is now gathering small bits of wood ; she makes small bundles of them and brings them home. Later on she will make heavier bundles.

"When she has grown up more, she will take charge of the work of her mother. She will do the work. But if the mother sees that she cannot do it all, she will help her. It may however be said that the mother needs no longer to crush her mealies, neither to go to the well nor to the fireplace. When she is quite a grown up girl, the suitors come. If they are accepted, they bring the purchase money. They buy her (lobola) and do all they like. If she is prolific, she will bear many children. Now and then she returns to her parents' village, then she comes back to her husband. Her children grow. They go to get water, to cut her wood, to plough her fields. She goes with them. When they are grown up, they get married. If amongst them there is a son, he goes to buy his wife. Thus she looks for a mother-in-law for her son. He will then be truly a man because he has got a mother-in-law! When her children are married, the mother again begins to do all her work. She steeps her mealies, crushes them to make flour, she cuts her wood, cooks her beer ; she prepares the light beer ; she smears the floor of her hut ; this is what she does till she is quite old.

"When she is quite old, they feed her. Her grandchildren are

1 [The following page is quoted from an essay by a native girl at the Swiss Mission school at Lourenço Marques -- Analyst]

888 sent to bring her food. When they are hungry, they stop on the way and eat it themselves. On their return they say: 'We have indeed given it to her.' In the morning they put a stick in her hand and help her to get out of her hut, so that she can warm herself in the sun.

"Then when the Ronga woman is quite old she begins to see no more and to hear no more. She falls into second childhood. All she does is to complain and to say, crying, that she is ill treated. And this is the end!"

The girl who wrote this essay was but emerging from childhood, and has consequently enlarged more especially upon the first phase of the life. The life of a woman is not very different from that of a man at that stage. Differences however come in later on, and we shall have to add some important facts relating to the fate of women before marriage, during the conjugal life, and in widowhood.

A. BEFORE MARRIAGE

I. *The Girls' games.*

857 334 [868] 864 As we have seen from the essay of the schoolgirl, Ronga girls imitate the doings of their mothers, their cooking, their gathering of fuel, etc., just as the boys imitate the fighting and hunting of the men. They also play with *dolls*, nursing them as they see the women nursing babies. These dolls are called *vule*. The origin of the game is as follows. A little girl asks her mother who is carrying a younger child on her shoulders: Mother, where did you find your baby? — Oh! I found it in the bush (ntlhaben). — Please bring me one also, mother. — All right!— Next day the mother plucks a sala in the bush, removes all the stones inside it, lets it dry and fixes it to the end of a stick. She pierces the upper part of the sphere, passes bits of string through the holes to imitate hair, smears them with ochre, ties a little clothing round

857 the stick and gives it to the girl! Or if the mother says: "I found
524 the baby in the banana grove," the father will cut a banana stem,
864 take the heart of the bulb and beat it so as to separate the fibres, which will then represent the hair of the baby; the girl will then play with it for a time.

Girls, like boys, have also special games.

524 First the *ntshengu -ntshengu*. A big girl takes the part of the mother and all the little ones hide behind her. She stretches out her arms to protect them against another girl, who is the thief and tries to take the children away. Notwithstanding the mother's efforts, all are taken one by one, and the stealing is done whilst they sing:

Alack! Mother! Protect us, protect us!

The mother answers:

All my children are taken, all will soon be taken,
All will soon be taken, there, behind me.

(Yo! Mamana! ntshengu-ntshengu! ba hela hi shiruba.

The capture being effected, all the children sit down in a row and cross their legs. To their right and left they dig small holes which represent wells or pots. The mother passes. She stretches out their legs and they allow her do this. Then she pretends to drink water from their pitchers and says: "My child, where did you find this water?" The child says: "Oh! I have drawn it over there, at the spring, under the banana trees, in the cool shade." Then comes the girl who plays the part of the thief. She tries to stretch out their legs. But the children refuse; they stiffen themselves. She tastes their water and enquires where they brought it from. "I drew it in a nasty hole full of frogs, mud and dirt." They add all the different remarks they can think of.

524 As the boys sing to the transport oxen when a wagon comes
136 along the road, so the girls address a kind of *incantation to a big*
533 *grey lizard* called *galagala*, which can turn its head blue at will. The lizard is found lying on a branch, warming itself in the rays

643 857 However, specially appointed persons watch over him and report of his well being to his father. His youthful playmates are taught to respect him ; he is surrounded in his games by a miniature court, from which he chooses his favourites (tinxekwa) : some of his companions act as counsellors and reprimand those who do not treat him with due respect. They play at court... also at soldiers ; the juvenile troop wage war with the wasps, and also with the boys of the adjoining villages.

643 787 777 751 782 When the child reaches boyhood, the bones are consulted, and sacrifices offered in order to ascertain from the gods whether it be well to take him to the capital. Should the answer be in the negative, there is nothing to do but wait. When the dice declare the propitious moment to have arrived, the transfer is effected and the boy taken to his father. This is a great occasion for the counsellors who have watched over the boy and who thenceforward supervise his education. They feast themselves well (ba fumisana), kill goats, perhaps even an ox, and offer a sacrifice to proclaim to the gods the return to the capital of the heir to the throne ; to his ankle is tied the astragalus of a slaughtered goat, as a protective amulet.

643 881 836 At puberty the boy undergoes, in the same manner as his companions, all the ceremonial rites usual at that period. The principal doctors of the country treat him, in order that henceforth he may be a man (ba mu yimisa a ba wanuna), having full right to enter into the sexual relations of gangisa (p. 97). Care is taken, however, to attach to his person comrades of riper age, who will prevent him giving way to excesses, (suka ḅanhwanyana la' bakulu ba ta mu gema, ba mu sibela ku kula), which would arrest his growth and render him small and feeble. He thus lives in relative continence, participating in the play and in the work of boys of his own age, and looking after the herds. At times he gives a feast, when his father happens to have presented him with an ox with which to make merry.

643 588 595 Now we see him arrived at manhood, at the age when the Blacks take a wife. If his father is still living, the young man is not allowed to marry officially. He may certainly lobola, viz., contract regular marriage in the usual way, and possibly

276 one rarely sees a Native with a pipe in his mouth, tobacco being almost exclusively used in the form of snuff. The only smokers in the country are the old women of Lourenço Marques, and the youthful dandies who try to imitate the Transvaal Boers!

532 Clay modelling is perhaps the art for which South Africans
●857 are best gifted. In all the tribes children amuse themselves by

A young Spelonken artist and his work. *Phot. J. Dautzenberg.*

modelling oxen, human beings, wheels, even waggons, sometimes very cleverly. I knew a boy in Shiluvane who was a true artist and could copy anything he saw, for instance a white lady with her hat on (1). The accompanying plate shows one of these young artists, from Spelonken, with his handiwork.

(1) The same boy, without having received any special training, could cut out a frock, and used to make the dresses of all the brides of the congregation. He had a wonderful eye for form and would have made his mark, had he received a professional training. But he died from consumption contracted in the towns!